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מרכז המסברה

ISRAEL OFFICE OF INFORMATION



EGYPT - ISRAEL RELATIONS

A. INTRODUCTION

1. Egypt's attitude towards Israel has taken a sharp turn for the worse in the course of recent months. Tension has risen to new heights. The lives and property of Israel's citizens have been attacked with increasing frequency. Egypt has persisted in its attitude of contempt for the resolution of the U. N. Security Council of 1 September 1951 and stubbornly refuses to release the Israel freighter Bat-Galim and allow it to proceed through the Suez Canal. Threats by Egyptian leaders against Israel have continued with growing violence. The execution of two Jewish defendants in the Cairo trial, in spite of pleas for clemency from all over the world, has further exacerbated the situation. The latest instance of Egyptian recklessness took the form of a raid into Israel territory at the end of February 1955. The raiding party penetrated as far as the town of Rehovot, 18 miles inside Israel territory, where on February 25th they murdered an Israel civilian from ambush. The same band operated in the vicinity of Rehovot for a few days. Its tracks were found clearly leading back to the Egyptian-controlled Gaza territory.

2. When the regime of King Farouk was overturned in the summer of 1952 by the Revolutionary Council led by General Naguib, the then Israel Prime Minister David Ben Gurion, publicly expressed Israel's readiness to cooperate with the new regime. In a public statement on August 18, 1952 Mr. Ben Gurion declared:

"Israel wishes to see Egypt free, independent, progressive. There were no grounds, nor are there now, for any quarrel between Egypt and Israel. There is no cause for territorial disputes, nor any reason for political or economic problems. We have no enmity against Egypt for what was done to us four years ago. We have never sought to exploit Egypt's political difficulties with a great Power by attacking her or taking revenge upon her, as she did upon the establishment of our State."

3. These friendly overtures which have been frequently repeated have brought no response. Indeed, the record of recent months indicates a growth in Egyptian hostility and a deliberate rejection of a policy of reconciliation.

B. BORDER UNREST GROWS

4. Between September 1954 and February 1, 1955 Egypt has been condemned on no fewer than 27 occasions for violations of the Israel-Egypt Armistice Agreement, including armed attack, murder and sabotage. Repeated warnings by the Mixed Armistice Commission to Egypt to put a halt to these acts of aggression have had no effect.

5. In the period between August 1954 and February 1955 the Egyptians were responsible for nine cases of sabotage and 34 armed clashes in Israel territory, in addition to numerous cases of illegal border crossings and plunder. The main targets of sabotage were the pipelines bringing water to the southern part of Israel on which all the settlements in the area depend for their very existence. The pipelines were blown up on four occasions causing considerable damage.

6. On January 21st an Egyptian army unit drove up to the armistice line and took up firing positions. Part of this unit crossed the frontier and attacked an Israel military post. Of the three Israel soldiers on duty, one was killed and two wounded. The Egyptians retreated only on the approach of Israel reinforcements. On January 24th the Israel-Egypt

Mixed Armistice Commission condemned Egypt for this attack. The Commission's resolution was worded as follows:

"Decides that this aggressive action carried out by a unit of the Egyptian army is in flagrant violation of Article II, Par. 2 of the General Armistice Agreement with Egypt;

"Notes with extremely grave concern this aggressive action and calls upon the Egyptian authorities to terminate these aggressive acts against Israel."

7. Only a few hours after this resolution was passed, on the night of January 24th, an armed band crossed the frontier into Israel from the Gaza strip and penetrated 4 miles into Israel territory, attacking the settlement of Ein Hashlosha. Two of the settlement's plowmen were ambushed, one killed and the other wounded. Three days later, Egypt was again condemned by the Mixed Armistice Commission for this act of aggression and the Commission passed the following resolution:

"Notes with grave concern the serious situation prevailing along the Gaza strip, resulting from these repeated attacks;

"Notes once again with extremely grave concern, that despite obligations imposed upon Egypt by the General Armistice Agreement and a number of Mixed Armistice Commission resolutions, these penetrations and killings of Israel citizens have not been terminated;

"Calls upon the Egyptian authorities to put an immediate end to such aggressive acts."

8. The incidents in January were the continuation of a long series of incidents which had been increasing in number and gravity in the latter part of 1954. As early as October 2, 1954 the Mixed Armistice Commission, in condemning Egypt for the murder of two Israel farmers on September 20th near Migdal Ashkelon, had called upon Egypt "immediately and finally" to put an end to these acts of aggression. Since January 1955 the incidents have continued despite the demands of the Mixed Armistice Commission that Egypt refrain from continued aggression. On February 1, 1955 fire was directed from Egyptian positions against an Israel patrol, and once again, Egypt was condemned by the Mixed Armistice Commission. The following day Egyptian soldiers fired at a member of an Israel border settlement at work in the fields. Later in February, an armed band was intercepted by an Israel patrol at Yad Mordecai in Israel territory. On February 25th two Israel police cars were fired at in Israel territory near Yavne. The same day, an armed band from the Gaza strip killed an Israel citizen near Rehovot, deep inside Israel's territory. Throughout this period illegal border crossings for the purpose of theft, espionage and illegal harvesting continued unabated.

C. ESPIONAGE, SABOTAGE BY INFILTRATORS

9. Egyptian Army Intelligence officers have been systematically organizing marauders who are sent into Israel, apparently from the Gaza strip, for purposes of espionage and sabotage. At the end of September 1954 a group sent to commit sabotage was caught after it had sniped at farmers and blown up houses in a border settlement. In December 1954 four youths were caught trying to gather military information in Israel. They admitted they had been trained and sent by Egyptian officers in Gaza.

10. Despite condemnations by the Mixed Armistice Commission, repeated well-organized military operations have

taken place against the vital water pipeline to the Negev, Israel's arid southern area. For the second time within a month, the main pipeline near Nir Am was blown up with TNT on September 7th by a group of trained saboteurs. On October 25th a similar attack on the pipeline near Mefalsim took place.

11. Noting the serious damage incurred, the Mixed Armistice Commission on the latter occasion emphasized its "great concern over the repeated acts of planned demolition on main water pipelines in Israel by well-trained, organized and armed groups coming from Egyptian-controlled territory."

12. Attacks on the Negev pipeline have not ceased. In December 1954 the pipeline near Uza was blown up. The Egyptian authorities have taken no steps to prevent the continuation of these planned attacks.

D. THE CASE OF THE BAT GALIM

13. On September 28, 1954 the Israel freighter Bat Galim, carrying a cargo of tinned beef, hides and plywood en route from Eritrea to Israel, was detained by the Egyptian authorities at Port Tewfik at the entrance to the Suez Canal. In an attempt to justify this illegal action, the Egyptian Government charged the crew of the Bat Galim with having committed various crimes in Egyptian territorial waters, ranging from trespassing to the killing of Egyptian fishermen.

These allegations were put forward not only to explain the detention of the vessel, but also to justify the detention of its ten crew members in a military prison under inhumane conditions, and the confiscation of the ship's treasury and cargo.

14. Investigations by United Nations Military Observers of the Egyptian-Israeli Mixed Armistice Commission, carried out at the request of the Security Council of the United Nations, proved the complete falsehood of these allegations, and, as a result, the Egyptian Government was forced to withdraw the charges, even from its own courts, and to release the crew. The Bat Galim itself and its cargo are still held by Egypt.

15. At meetings of the Security Council of the United Nations held on January 4 and January 13, 1955, Egypt's attitude was severely criticized by the majority of representatives. Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge, on behalf of the United States, said:

"... we cannot fail to state our view that Egyptian restrictions on ships passing through the Suez Canal whether bound to or from Israel, or whether flying the Israeli or some other flag, are inconsistent with the spirit and intent of the Egyptian-Israeli General Armistice Agreement, contrary to the Security Council resolution of September 1, 1951, and a retrogression from the stated objectives to which both sides committed themselves in signing the Armistice Agreement."

16. Under the Charter of the United Nations, decisions of the Security Council, as distinct from recommendations of the General Assembly, are binding upon all members. Egypt, by flouting the Security Council decision of September 1, 1951, which called upon her "to terminate the restrictions on the passage of international shipping and goods through the Suez Canal wherever bound, and to cease all interference with such shipping . . ." has consistently and deliberately violated the Charter which she signed in 1945. The records of the United Nations contain no parallel to this wilful and persistent defiance of the Security Council.

17. On January 13, 1955, the President of the Security Council, Sir Leslie Munro of New Zealand, summed up the wish of that body to see the Bat Galim released through the Suez Canal within the context of the 1951 resolution. Egypt has to this day ignored this expression of international opinion.

E. CAIRO SENTENCES SHOCK WORLD OPINION

18. While assaults increased against Israeli citizens, and Egypt persisted in her defiance of United Nations' wishes concerning the Bat Galim, twelve Jews were charged with espionage on behalf of Israel before a military court in Cairo. During the trial, the defendants testified that torture had been used to extract confessions from them. One defendant, Elias Cremona, died under torture before coming to trial;

another, Max Bennett, committed suicide during the trial; a third, Victorine Nino, threw herself from a window during pre-trial interrogation, but survived; the French Consul-General in Cairo, who attended all sessions of the trial, reported that the body of one of the defendants, Moshe Marzouk, a French citizen, bore the marks of the brutal treatment he had received during the interrogation.

The crimes of which these people were accused were described in the London Times as "too amateurish to be taken seriously." Mr. Roger Baldwin, Chairman of the International League for the Rights of Man, who was in Cairo during the trial, described the charges of espionage and sabotage as "childish and irrational."

19. On January 27, 1955, two of the defendants, Moshe Marzouk, a physician, and Shmuel Azar, a school teacher, were sentenced to hang; two defendants were given life terms, and four others long sentences. The death sentences, which were confirmed by Colonel Nasser, the Egyptian Prime Minister, were carried out on January 31 despite pleas for clemency from all over the world and from all quarters, including the Secretary-General of the United Nations, the Governments of the United States and France, the Latin American delegations to the United Nations, and prominent individuals the world over.

20. Condemnation of the brutality of these sentences was world-wide. The Washington Post (February 4) called the hangings "judicial lynching" and described them as representing the lengths to which the Egyptian Government would go in its "desperate effort" to retain the seniority of the Arab bloc. The New York Herald Tribune of February 1 said: "... the hasty executions stemmed as much from political conditions as from the demands of justice." Mr. Baldwin stated that "the conclusion is inescapable that the executions were ordered for political reasons, despite prior private official assurances of leniency."

F. CAIRO THREATS CONTINUE UNABATED

21. In this recent period marked by growing border unrest, Egyptian defiance of the UN, and disregard of world opinion in regard to the mock trial in Cairo, Egyptian leaders and official publications have maintained their anti-Israel propaganda offensive. Not only is all prospect of peace rejected, but threats against the very existence of Israel are made.

22. An editorial in "Al Gomhouria," official mouthpiece of the regime, stated recently:

"Egypt and the Arabs must turn in the name of humanity and its culture to all nations of the world who will aid in wiping Israel off the face of the map because of its barbarism."
(Oct. 15/54)

The following statement was made on "Saut El-Arab" (Voice of the Arabs), the official broadcasting station:

"Egypt sees Israel as a cancer endangering the Arab people. Egypt is the physician who can uproot this cancer. Egypt does not forget that it is her obligation to take revenge, and she is mobilizing all her forces in anticipation of the hoped-for day."
(Nov. 16/54)

23. Recent statements by Major Saleh Salem, Egyptian Minister of National Guidance, stress the refusal to make peace under any circumstances. Speaking to visiting Syrian journalists in connection with Egyptian armament plans, Salem said:

"Egypt's policy has not ceased to rest on the principle of 'no peace with Israel' in any form and at any time. Egypt will not make peace with Israel even if Israel were to implement the UN resolutions on Palestine."
(Dec. 27/54)

Again, in similar vein, Major Salem stated to another group of visitors on January 9:

"Egypt will strive to erase the shame of the Palestine war even if Israel should fulfill the UN resolutions. It will not sign a peace with her. Even if Israel should consist only of Tel Aviv, we should never put up with that."

(as quoted in the Manchester Guardian, January 28, 1955)

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